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Spain: The NATO Referendum and US- Spanish Military Ties

Special National Intelligence Estimate

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*SNIE 27.1-2-85
October 1985*

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**SPAIN: THE NATO
REFERENDUM AND US-
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Information available as of 10 October 1985 was used in the preparation of this Estimate, which was approved by the National Foreign Intelligence Board on 10 October 1985.

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THIS ESTIMATE IS ISSUED BY THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE.

THE NATIONAL FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE BOARD CONCURS, EXCEPT AS NOTED IN THE TEXT.

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of the Estimate:

The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and the Treasury.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force

The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps

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SCOPE NOTE

SNIE 27.1-85, *Spain and the Western Security System*, in March 1985 discussed potential problems in Spain's security relations with the West but argued that Prime Minister Gonzalez probably had the will and the ability to keep Spain in NATO and to contain leftist pressure for a significant reduction in the US military presence in Spain. The purpose of this Estimate is to assess Gonzalez's current views on and the prospects for a referendum on Spain's membership in NATO. It evaluates the principal options that remain open to him until Parliament begins its examination of Spanish foreign policy in late October. The paper closes by examining the effects that Gonzalez's referendum strategy and, more particularly, a referendum defeat could have on Spanish participation in the Western security system and on the US military presence in Spain. [REDACTED]

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KEY JUDGMENTS

During the seven months since the publication of SNIE 27.1-85, Prime Minister Gonzalez has become increasingly committed to holding a referendum by spring 1986 on Spain's membership in NATO—a referendum he is likely to lose. Opinion polls indicate that public resistance to participation in the Alliance remains widespread, and Gonzalez and his advisers have still not come up with an effective strategy to overcome that opposition. [REDACTED]

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Gonzalez, however, still has three options to back out of the referendum:

- His most promising escape hatch is to call an early national election—which he would probably win—and to fold the NATO issue into a vote on his government's overall program.
- He could take advantage of the constitutional prohibition against holding a referendum 90 days before or after a regional or national election; by instigating a crisis in one of the regional governments controlled by the Socialists, he could trigger a local election that would close the brief remaining opportunity for holding the referendum before next fall, when his four-year term ends and national elections must take place.
- He could slowly back away from the referendum by postponing it, claiming that the additional time would put him in a better position to negotiate a larger cutback in the US military presence. [REDACTED]

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Time, however, is rapidly running out for Gonzalez. During the debate following his State of the Nation address to Parliament later this month, opposition politicians will press him to commit himself to a course of action. Any recommitment to the referendum at that time and in that highly formal and publicized setting would be difficult to back out of later. [REDACTED]

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If Gonzalez does go ahead with the referendum, his most likely strategy is to tie continued membership in NATO to a reduction in the US military presence in Spain, reaffirmation of Spain's nonnuclear strategy, and reiteration of his position—deliberately ambiguous in our view—that Madrid does not “need” to integrate militarily into the Alliance. In our view, such a strategy will not produce a referendum victory. But any US promises made in the course of the referendum

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campaign are likely simply to weaken Washington's opening bargaining position in the negotiations to renew the bilateral agreement, which expires in 1988. []

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No matter what the outcome of the referendum issue, Spain is likely to maintain its pro-Western course: The leaderships of all political parties except the Communists agree that Spain's security is best assured by active participation in Western defense efforts. And a referendum victory—though unlikely—would indicate the development of a more internationalist outlook in Spain's population as well. Even in the more likely event that Gonzalez lost the referendum, he would probably still keep Spain in NATO by resorting to the tactic he could have used to avoid that vote in the first place—calling a snap election and asking for endorsement of his overall political program, including continued Alliance participation. Regardless of the final vote, however, a referendum campaign would probably highlight the US military presence and almost assure that opposition to US basing privileges would increase. An outright referendum defeat, moreover, would energize Communists, neutralists, and anti-Western forces in Spain as they had never been before. As a result, the momentum toward greater Spanish participation in Western defense efforts that has marked Gonzalez's first years in power would slow and perhaps halt altogether over the next several years. []

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There is another view that differs significantly from certain of the preceding judgments.¹ This view takes exception to those key judgments that suggest that Gonzalez still has options for backing out of the referendum, that if he holds the referendum he is likely to lose, but that if he loses it he is likely to keep Spain in NATO anyway. It is agreed that if the referendum were held today Gonzalez would lose it. But Gonzalez's statements in Washington and Bonn began the referendum campaign in earnest, and his ability to carry it off should not be underestimated, particularly because there is a reasonable chance the conservative opposition can be brought around to participate actively in favor of NATO membership. Consequently, this dissenting view holds that the referendum outcome—though not promising right now—is not foreordained and may remain in doubt until the voters go to the polls. Much depends on how the proposition on the ballot is worded, the subject of discussion in Madrid. Finally, should Gonzalez lose the referendum, this dissenting view believes Gonzalez will have great difficulty keeping Spain in NATO. And if Spain leaves NATO, our base rights will be in serious jeopardy. []

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¹ The holder of this view is the Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State.

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DISCUSSION

1. The future of Spain's security relations with the West has become more problematic since publication of SNIE 27.1-85 in March.² Prime Minister Gonzalez appears intent on keeping a campaign pledge to hold a referendum—now promised by spring 1986—on Spanish membership in NATO. However, he has shown a distinct lack of leadership on the issue. Further, public opinion has remained broadly opposed to membership despite Spain's impending entry into the EC and progress in Madrid's efforts to repatriate Gibraltar—two developments previously thought particularly likely to rally support for the Atlantic Alliance. Conservative leaders, meanwhile, have grown increasingly disinclined to give Gonzalez the support he almost certainly needs to win a referendum. The bungling of the Cabinet reshuffle in July and the ill-considered use of former dictator Franco's yacht in August have also raised doubts that Gonzalez retains the touch he would need to see the NATO issue through to a positive conclusion. [REDACTED]

The Referendum Quagmire

2. These developments, indeed, generate concern that Gonzalez could be on the verge of losing control of events—drifting into a referendum that he has an uncertain chance at best of winning. He may lock himself into that vote later in October when he delivers his annual State of the Nation address to Parliament. Even if his formal remarks do not irrevocably commit him to go ahead with the referendum, he could come under substantial pressure during the ensuing parliamentary debate to clear up any remaining ambiguities on the point. Whatever room for maneuver he did manage to preserve, though, would almost certainly dissipate during the parliamentary debate over Spain's foreign policy that is planned for late November or early December. Socialist leaders are already on record that they will reveal the date for the referendum then, and they have hinted that they might also announce the text of the referendum proposition itself at that time. [REDACTED]

² The Director, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State takes exception to a number of the judgments made in this SNIE. A full exposition of his views is contained in the last paragraph of the Key Judgments. [REDACTED]

3. A lost referendum would slow but not end Spain's drive to escape from isolation and to enter the Western mainstream. Since taking office, Gonzalez has grown steadily more convinced that Spain needs full economic and political partnership with other Western nations and that close security ties are an important element of that relationship. His conversion to that position has contributed to a broad consensus among leaders of the non-Communist political parties and the business elite in favor of an actively pro-Western foreign policy—support for EC accession, NATO membership, the US military presence, and, most recently, COCOM membership. The public, however, remains more isolationist in outlook and appears particularly dubious of the value to Spain of security ties to NATO and of the US military presence. A referendum defeat would force Gonzalez to devise a new way to rally Spanish opinion behind his security program, which includes membership in NATO. A defeat would also energize neutralist and anti-Western forces in Spain as they had never been before. Once galvanized, those elements would increase their pressure against the US military presence and other Western security interests. Those developments would make it harder for other Western leaders to accept Spain as a reliable partner. [REDACTED]

4. Gonzalez recognizes the risks involved, but his [REDACTED] makes it hard for him to reverse course. He knows that an important ingredient in his political success has been his carefully crafted reputation for sincerity and trustworthiness, and that image would take a beating if he could not justify abandoning a pledge he has repeated so often. Gonzalez realizes as well that backing out of the referendum would produce an uproar among leftists and would particularly anger many of his fellow Socialists. [REDACTED]

The press has [REDACTED]

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also begun to criticize his isolation from the public. His relationship with the King, who has played a crucial role in Spain's democratic, pro-Western evolution, has also deteriorated, in part because Gonzalez has not heeded the monarch's warnings to abandon the referendum. [redacted]

5. We believe a flawed reading of his prospects for success is another reason Gonzalez has not abandoned the referendum. He has been telling [redacted]

[redacted] that he can win the vote if he can show that membership has produced something of value for Spain, and he claims that reductions in the US military presence and reaffirmation of Spain's nonnuclear status would help him make that case. That reasoning led him to request the bilateral security talks, which are to begin on 23 October [redacted]

[redacted] another part of Gonzalez's approach would be to tell the electorate that Spain could not expect to enjoy the benefits of EC membership without accepting the responsibility of participating in the defense of Western Europe through continued NATO membership—in other words, an appeal to Spanish national pride. Additionally, he may reiterate to voters—probably with calculated ambiguity—that he sees no “need” for Spain to integrate militarily into the Alliance. Gonzalez may also hope that a cleverly formulated referendum question will elicit a positive vote. [redacted]

[redacted] even an extensive pro-NATO campaign drawing on these gambits might not be enough to persuade a majority of Spaniards that Alliance membership is desirable. They nonetheless hope that enough left-of-center voters, out of loyalty to Gonzalez and the Socialist Party, would swallow their private convictions and vote for the referendum. [redacted]

6. A referendum victory would certainly give a major boost to Spain's security relations with the West. It would badly demoralize anti-Western activists and would firmly establish Spain's vocation as an Ally. Although Gonzalez may discount the possibility of military integration, the positive referendum vote would mean that gradual, low-key, and partial movement in that direction would be possible at some point in Gonzalez's second term in office. In a similar manner, Gonzalez's position regarding the US military presence might become more flexible after a referendum victory. [redacted]

Active Opponents, Few Supporters

7. In our judgment, however, the odds remain heavily against winning a referendum. Since Gonzalez took office, the most reliable polls indicate that oppo-

nents of NATO have outnumbered supporters by a fairly constant 50 to 25 percent, with approximately 25 percent of the electorate undecided. Spanish polls have been effective predictors of election and referendum results in the past. Further, whether by design or default, Gonzalez has not articulated a clear strategy for winning the referendum. He now appears to be thinking more deeply about the issue, but we still have no reason to suppose that Gonzalez will succeed over the next six months or so in disabusing voters of their major anxiety concerning NATO—that participation in the Alliance increases the danger that Spain could be dragged into an East-West war. [redacted]

8. Nor is Gonzalez likely to get the active support he almost certainly needs from conservative politicians whose constituents are a major portion of potential pro-NATO voters. The conservatives are already gearing up for the next national election, which must be held by the end of 1986, and fear that helping Gonzalez in the referendum would hurt them in the election. Moreover, they doubt a referendum can be won, and many of them see national security decisions as the province of Parliament rather than a plebiscite.

9. Gonzalez, in fact, would probably get only limited support from his own party. Socialist trade unionists and youth groups have already declared themselves publicly against NATO. Gonzalez's firm grip on the party machinery would probably be enough to prevent those groups from campaigning against him, but a number of their members—and Socialist voters generally—would probably still vote against the Alliance. [redacted]

10. The Communists would also cause Gonzalez trouble. Although Spanish Communists are badly divided and are not likely to receive much more than 5 percent of the vote in the next national election, they are the driving force behind the peace movement and will organize large, noisy demonstrations against Alliance participation. We believe that Moscow would underwrite some of the costs of that effort if it concluded that there was a good chance of defeating Gonzalez in the referendum. There is a chance, however, that Moscow could overplay its hand—perhaps by repeating the public bullying tactics it had

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used four years ago to discourage Parliament from voting for NATO membership. That effort embarrassed leftist opponents of the Alliance, and a rerun of those tactics now would probably also backfire. The anti-NATO cause similarly would be set back if leftist activists resorted to violence. []

Would Spain Leave NATO?

11. We do not believe that Gonzalez would accept a no vote on NATO as a definitive verdict, but several considerations do make that course a distinct, if unlikely, possibility. Gonzalez would, of course, have an easier time running for reelection if he accepted the popular will than if he defied it. His extensive use of opinion polls, in fact, suggests that he is at least occasionally as much inclined to follow as to lead public sentiment. Gonzalez would also know that accepting a negative verdict would be his best way of keeping his political machine—the Socialist Party—united behind him. Indeed, rejecting the referendum outcome would produce some highly visible resignations, even though Gonzalez's tight grip on the organization and the absence of potential rivals means that he could almost certainly beat back any challenge to his leadership. []

12. More importantly, whatever the combination of factors that has prevented him from canceling the referendum so far, those same traits could prevent him from taking the politically and personally painful steps that would be necessary to keep Spain in the Atlantic Alliance after a referendum defeat. []

13. We believe it more likely, however, that Gonzalez would stay in office and keep Spain in NATO, even in the face of a severe referendum defeat. He knows that there is a consensus among the leadership of all political parties except the Communists that Spain cannot revert to an isolationist stance. Just as important, since taking office Socialist leaders have sought to reassure conservative interest groups of their moderation in order to govern effectively and to maintain domestic stability. Gonzalez has been particularly concerned with maintaining good relations with the military, and he knows that many senior officers would oppose leaving NATO. He also knows that the King and business community would look askance at such a move. []

14. As for Gonzalez himself, he has come to fancy his new position as a Western leader and recognizes

that leaving NATO would deal a serious blow to that pretention. Moreover, he is a fighter by nature and has often been at his best in overcoming difficult circumstances. Socialist leaders have already said that a low voter turnout would not be indicative of true Spanish opinion and, furthermore, have reminded the voters that the constitution does not permit binding foreign policy referendums. Gonzalez himself told a Socialist meeting last spring that in case of an adverse vote he would call a snap election and include continued membership in his platform. Although he denied that statement when it appeared in the press, we believe Gonzalez would follow exactly that course. A referendum defeat would certainly tarnish his standing with the voters, but the approximately 20-percent lead he enjoys in the polls over his nearest rival—the conservative Popular Coalition—suggests that he would still be a good bet to win another term in office. It is possible that a referendum setback could lead Gonzalez to resign, using a tactic he has employed with his party in the past, as a means of regaining his position by demonstrating how much he is needed. []

15. A referendum defeat would nevertheless be costly. Gonzalez's concern for maintaining party unity as well as for preserving his self-respect in front of left-of-center voters would force him to take account of the voters' expressed anti-NATO sentiment. He might pledge to reexamine Spanish security policy in his second term, and he could also rule out military integration into the Alliance. At best, even under those conditions, Gonzalez might quietly let stand the limited and selective participation in some Alliance military-related committees and agencies he has already permitted, despite the official freeze on integration in December 1982. []

Alternatives to the Referendum

16. Gonzalez and his advisers have grown increasingly worried about the uncertainty of winning a referendum and the high price of failure. []

[] Gonzalez may also be susceptible to admonitions from his European allies about the need to stay in NATO and the inadvisability of holding the referendum. We believe he has three principal alternatives to going ahead with the referendum next spring. []

17. Both the press and opposition politicians agree that Gonzalez's most likely escape hatch would be to call an early election and to tell the voters that he was

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giving them a chance to vote on his pro-NATO position along with his other policies. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe the Prime Minister is reluctant to opt for this course. He probably recognizes that it would fool no one and that he would lose some credibility as a result. The Communists and peace activists, moreover, have already said that they would organize large demonstrations to hold Gonzalez to account if he abandoned the referendum. [redacted]

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18. [redacted]

the Communists would be equally certain to hold large anti-NATO—and thus anti-Gonzalez—demonstrations if he does go ahead with the referendum and leads a pro-NATO campaign. Indeed, calling an early election might be Gonzalez's best chance to shift attention from NATO, an issue on which he has been on the defensive, to domestic issues that, according to the opinion polls, concern more voters and draw more support for Gonzalez. Disgruntled leftists would certainly try to revive the NATO issue if Gonzalez won a second term, but the explicit mandate he received with reelection to continue in the Alliance would allow him to brush aside much of the carping from that quarter. Spaniards would probably then gradually become accustomed to participation in the Alliance and slowly return to their traditional passive acceptance of government decisions on security and foreign policy matters. In short, an early national election is probably as much in Washington's interest as it is in Gonzalez's because that course is likely to win at least indirect public endorsement of NATO membership and might then allow the issue to fade. [redacted]

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19. A less satisfactory alternative for both Gonzalez and the United States would be to take advantage of the constitutional prohibition against holding votes of that sort 90 days before or after a regional or national election. The only opportunity for holding the referendum is during a few weeks in March because a regional election is already set in Galicia for 24 November and likely to occur in Andalusia in late June or July. The Socialists control or hold the balance of power in 14 of Spain's 17 regional assemblies. Gonzalez could trigger a political crisis in any one of those areas that would require a regional election and close the only window of opportunity for the referendum before next fall, when his four-year term expires and another national election must take place. [redacted]

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20. [redacted]

[redacted] this course could be an "ideal"

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solution to Gonzalez's referendum dilemma. In a variation on this ploy, a Catalan leftist argued late last month in a leading Spanish newspaper that he believes Gonzalez has already worked out a behind-the-scenes deal to achieve the same end in a less obvious way by having Jordi Pujol, the head of the Catalan regional government dominated by the Catalan Democratic Convergence Party, call a regional election early next year. This scheme strikes us as too transparent and more likely to lose Gonzalez the respect of the voters than a straightforward call for another national election, and it could also work against US interests by keeping the NATO issue alive into a second Gonzalez administration. [redacted]

21. [redacted]

[redacted] a third alternative—postponing the referendum until 1988 and claiming to his public that the additional time would improve Madrid's bargaining position to win a pledge from Washington to reduce the US military presence in Spain. This approach would clearly be against US interests. But Gonzalez might hope that by that date either Spaniards will be more accustomed to NATO and willing to vote for continued membership or that some as yet unforeseeable event will provide him with a plausible excuse for canceling the referendum. A major reason why Gonzalez would hesitate to resort to this expedient is because it would definitely drag out the NATO issue well into a second term. In our view, that course would be as unpalatable to Gonzalez as it would be uncharacteristic of him. Moreover, this course would also put Gonzalez on more of a collision path with Washington than we believe he wants. [redacted]

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Implications for the United States

22. If Gonzalez persists on the referendum course, the pressure on Washington to help him by making reduction promises will increase. In our view, US promises would not produce a referendum victory, but would simply weaken Washington's opening bargaining position in the negotiations to renew the bilateral agreement that expires in 1988. Even though [redacted] any such concessions would not be binding if the referendum fails, there would still be strong public opinion pressure to hold Washington to any cutbacks it had agreed to—possibly even before 1988. On the other hand, if concessions are not made, Gonzalez is likely to blame the United States if he loses the referendum. More-

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over, the longer the NATO issue is unresolved, the more the US military presence is likely to become a part of Spain's national security debate. [REDACTED]

Outlook

23. In our judgment, Gonzalez is so strongly identified with the West and restrained by institutions within Spain—the King, the military, and the business community—as well as those outside the country—most notably, his new EC partners—that we see little likelihood that he would fundamentally alter his pro-Western course even if he continued to stumble with individual security issues. Even more important, the leaders of all political parties except the Communists generally agree that Spain's security is best assured by active participation in the Western alliance. Gonzalez's own Socialists are the least enthusiastic backers of this outlook, but Gonzalez's leadership is solid and

likely to remain so, no matter what the referendum outcome. [REDACTED]

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24. Nonetheless, the outlook for Spain's security ties to the West is certainly less favorable today than when our Estimate was published seven months ago. Instead of taking charge of events by loosening his commitment to the referendum, Gonzalez has allowed that promise to stand and is on the verge of becoming its prisoner—becoming more committed to a vote he is likely to lose. Even if he managed to pull off a favorable result, a referendum campaign would probably highlight the US military presence and assure that opposition to US basing privileges will also increase. Indeed, if Gonzalez persists in entangling the US military presence with the NATO issue and loses the referendum, we see a growing possibility that the momentum of the first years of his administration toward greater Spanish participation in Western defense efforts will slow and perhaps halt altogether within the next several years. [REDACTED]

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